OTF/FEO Interaction ... on line

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Fellow Teachers,

On November 20, 1998, I had the honour of representing you at the first Education Day of the Canadian Aboriginal Festival at Toronto's SkyDome. There were over 9,000 students and their teachers in attendance. OTF was very happy to be a co-sponsor, with the Toronto Star, of this day. Every teacher who brought a group of students to the day will be receiving an evaluation form. We are looking forward to getting some creative suggestions for improvement so that this day can be an annual event. I am also happy that the Canadian Teachers' Federation endorsed the day, and will be working with the organizers on making this a national activity.

Recently, I attended the Tri-National Conference in Defence of Public Education in Mexico. It is remarkable how consistent are the threats to publicly funded education in Canada, the United States and Mexico. The continual decline in adequate funding for the publicly funded education systems was also a consistent theme. The passionate and universal opposition to standardized testing which has served to siphon off the poor and working class students to dead end occupations in Mexico is a warning to teachers in Canada. The other thread that can be found in all three countries is the level of commitment of teachers to defending public education and the right of every student to an education. It is interesting to note that November 20th has been designated as National Child Day. This day marks the anniversary of the United Nations' adoption of both the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which took place on November 20, 1959, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was established 30 years later on November 20, 1989. I know that each and every one of you keeps the rights of students foremost in all that you do.

We are carefully discussing and planning how we will conduct ourselves (OTF and the Affiliates) from now to the election and beyond.

Since I last wrote to you, the Government of Ontario has announced a change in the funding formula which will have the effect of delaying the closing of schools. It was a grassroots movement of parents and other concerned community members with support from teachers which was instrumental in the retreat of the Harris Government. These kinds of alliances are important to ensure that we are all vigilant in our defense of public education.

Yours truly,

L. Barkley

Liz Barkley

The OTF Executive met in the OTF Offices on November 21, 1998 and some of the issues discussed were:

Same Sex Benefits under the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan
The OTF Executive has been concerned for some time now that federal and provincial legislation, as well as the Teachers' Pension Act, precludes people in same sex relationships from naming their partners as beneficiaries of their pensions. The Pension Committee has done a great deal of work trying to change this situation. At the Saturday meeting, the Executive agreed to seek intervenor status in a suit being brought forward by OPSEU to force changes to the legislation and practice to ensure fair treatment for people with same sex partners.

At the same time, OTF is drafting amendments to redefine the term "spouse" and to offer to plan members with same sex partners the same provisions that presently exist for other plan members. These provisions are being prepared with the help of legal counsel. Once these amendments have received approval from both partners (Government and OTF), they will be incorporated into the Pension Plan.

Teacher Supply and Demand
With the baby boomers reaching retirement age, the OTF Executive has been discussing the possibility of a teacher shortage in Ontario in the next few years. In the middle of November, the Ontario College of Teachers released a report on teacher supply and demand. The OTF Executive has requested the Teacher Education Staff Work Group to study the report and to report on the implication and solutions to the projected shortages.

Political Action Pilot Workshops
The Executive received a report from a pilot workshop on involvement in political campaigns that was held in North Bay on November 14, 1998 by the political action staff officers of OTF and the Affiliates. The day focussed in a non-partisan way on how an election campaign works, how to get involved in campaigns as a volunteer, and how to join a political party. There will be another 12 of these workshops. Look for a notice of when the workshop will be available in your area.

Canadian Teachers' Federation
The Canadian Teachers' Federation has announced that David Eaton will be the next General Secretary. David, a former General Secretary of

OSSTF, will take up his appointment early in January.

School Councils
OTF welcomed the Education Improvement Commission's (EIC) report on School Councils, released on November 19, 1998. OTF and the Affiliates met with the EIC on two occasions to provide teacher input on School Councils.

OTF President Liz Barkley noted, "The report reflects the Federation position that School Councils have an important and significant role to play in our schools. They are the means of connecting the entire school community — parents, teachers, principals and the community at large."

The report recommends that parents who are teachers be allowed to serve on School Councils. President Barkley commented, "This represents a reversal of the EIC's previous position and is the direct result of OTF and Affiliate intervention."

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